

March 20, 2025

**Azalea Renfield – Testimony in Support of SB 1110**

Senate Labor & Business Committee

Good morning Chair Taylor, Vice-Chair Bonham, and committee members.

My name is Azalea Renfield, and I am the Executive Director of Williams & Russell CDC. We are a nonprofit dedicated to restoring community and revitalizing economic development in NE Portland, specifically the Hill Block. The Hill Block Served as the center of the African American commercial district from the 1940s to the early 1960s.

Sadly, the City of Portland condemned the site in the early 1970s under urban renewal for an expansion of the Emanuel Hospital campus. The condemnation displaced 171 families, 74% of which were African American, and 36 businesses were displaced. The property has sat vacant for over five decades.

In August 2017 Legacy Health and Prosper Portland agreed to convene a project working group to give the 1.7-acre block of land back to the community and Williams & Russell was born.

We address community development and economic development through a three-pronged approach. We are developing 85 affordable, one- to three-bedroom units with onsite daycare, 20 townhomes for homeownership, and a 30,000-square-foot Business Hub to support entrepreneurs, professional development, and workforce training in Portland's Albina neighborhood. Our total project cost for all three parts of the project is \$129 million and the cost for the Business Hub is \$34 million.

We have not come to you first for funding but instead after securing significant funding from other sources. For the Business Hub we have obtained funding from the City of Portland, congressionally directed appropriations, Meyer Memorial Trust, a U.S. Federal Wood Innovation grant, and a pending Portland Clean Energy Fund grant.

In short, we have all but \$8.75 million for the project and we are respectfully asking you to provide this final amount – which is 7% of the total project cost.

I want to thank Senator Frederick and Representative Nelson for sponsoring Senate Bill 1110. They recognize the importance of providing opportunities for businesses and entrepreneurs to thrive.

Today, you will hear testimony from several project partners including from a long-standing business owner who lost his business like so many others 50 years ago due to the condemnation of the Hill Block.

It is my hope that our stories and experiences earn your support. Your support will make all the difference for our community and for our economy.



# Williams Russell CDC

The Williams & Russell CDC is building a vibrant economy and community on the historic Hill Block in Portland's Albina Neighborhood. The heart of Oregon's historic Black commercial district will beat again with support for small business, economic growth, and entrepreneurs.

**Williams & Russell CDC seeks legislative support for \$8.75 million to build a business hub in Portland's Albina neighborhood.**

In the early 1970s, the Portland Development Commission condemned the area for expansion of Emanuel Hospital, displacing over 30 businesses and 171 families, 74% of whom were Black. To restore community ties, Legacy Health is returning a 1.7-acre block at North Russell Street and North Williams Avenue—vacant for over 50 years—to the community to create accessible home ownership, affordable apartments, and business opportunities.

This 30,000-square-foot Williams & Russell Business Hub will provide affordable office and retail space for entrepreneurs and community partner organizations supporting small business and economic growth.

## The Williams & Russell Business Hub will include:



Affordable office, co-working, and retail spaces for businesses and community partner organizations as well as workforce training, professional development, and business services such as legal assistance.



Mass Timber construction striving for LEED Gold with community event space, underground parking, and a public plaza.







The Business Hub is a critical part of the Williams & Russell project which also includes affordable homeownership and apartments as well as a public plaza and community space.

# Your Support is Needed

We are requesting \$8.75 million from the Oregon Legislature to complete funding for the Williams & Russell Business Hub. Your support is vital to building small business and economic opportunities at the center of Oregon's historic Black commercial district. Together, we can create a thriving community for future generations.

